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From A Window on the Bus – Democracy in Full View

I have used public transportation since 1977, which means I am afforded the opportunity of closely observing government operations in our community.

Without having to keep my eyes keenly focused when driving; or my head downwardly focused on a mobile device screen; my eyes are looking left and right. Pondering. Wondering.

In my embarking on observations of democracy in our community Akron, Ohio – Summit County Ohio, there is an equation burned into my mind of how I write of matters of our democracy: a thoughtful mind – a caring heart.

Throughout my life, of all the political newsletters I received, one penned by Daniel Patrick Moynihan presented a humanness of our political process. It was if he was seated next to me engaging in a one-on-one conversation. His newsletters were the best.

Unfortunately, with the evolution of new communication technologies, the congressional franking privilege of mailing newsletters seems to have gone out of style.

Here was a politician that weaved a path of effective public service, shoulder to shoulder with Republicans and Democrats; Special Counsel to the President; Ambassador to the United Nations, and later to India; United States Senator. He was a nice human being with an insightful mind.

His quiet, thoughtful demeanor is a reminder, that yes, the quiet, respectful person can have an influence in our democracy. (See Susan Cain 's book ***The Quiet Revolution***)

For the purposes of our joining together, allow me to reflect upon what I see as I take public transportation; observations of the Cuyahoga Valley and points, in between, to my final destination in downtown Akron.

On my bus ride - In looking to my left and right – I see the impact of government at almost every turn – and every straight-away . There are parks, streets, sidewalks, a water treatment center, and water

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systems to maintain. There are schools to operate, and historical sites to be maintained by non-profit organizations, where visitors can consider a city, and nation's history.

And there are centers – spiritual centers – where there is room for quiet contemplation.

In our democracy, we need to foster individual awareness.

I ride on a public transit system supported by sales tax dollars – voter approved; and taxpayer dollars from the state and federal governments. The system could not be supported by its customer fare box proceeds . (The threshold for what an appropriate passenger fare is something of ongoing review.)

The Akron Metro Transit is governed by a board of directors. (The Ohio Revised Code provides the guidelines for the appointment, by elected officials, of members of local governing boards.

See: Wittenberg University political science professor John R. Baker's book ***Government in the Twilight Zone –Volunteers to Small - City Boards and Commissions***)

So to reference the Baker book, it's worthy to consider who sits on the various boards that impact public policy.

So off we go.

I look to my right, the bus crosses railroad tracks; the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad – the tracks maintained by the federal Department of Interior; close by is the entrance to the Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area.

How this national recreation area was created is an interesting story of democracy in action.

The Gerald Ford Presidential Library (Ann Arbor, Michigan) is full of documentation about the political process by which thousands of acres in the Cuyahoga River valley were purchased by the federal government. Republicans and Democrats were involved in the process.

Enter presidential election politics (1976) and a balancing act between those who wanted a state run park, and those who espoused federal control.

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Soon the bus passes the entrance of the local county park system – a property tax helps support the park system (and, too, another appointed board).

A bicycle lane figures into the road configuration. This requires a city's focus on keeping that portion of the roadway clear of debris for the bicyclists. And in that safety consideration, pedestrian crosswalk lines, and signage require the city's attention.

And a turn is made and we pass two schools – the Harvey S. Firestone Community Learning Center (named for the founder of Firestone Tire and Rubber) – and the Paul Litchfield Community Learning Center (named for a Goodyear Tire executive); and entering our “thought radar” – property taxes – millage - school choice – school vouchers .

Following a straight road, you see a historical mansion of a rubber magnate– The Frank Seiberling mansion - known as Stan Hywet – maintained by a non-profit organization

At every turn you witness the historical significance of rubber manufacturing in a community, and the off -shoot industries.

Crossing a commercial railway system, keen on following federally mandated safety requirements, you realize government mandates impact our lives.

To the left, and right are the leisure time gathering spots for many political types. It's interesting to sit, sip on a beverage, eat, and listen. A newspaper writer from another era, be it Walter Winchell, or Drew Pearson would find newspaper copy in these types of establishments. (And down the street is the Akron home where the 1940 GOP presidential nominee Wendell Willkie once lived.)

There is a state regulated liquor store. Then the bus passes three schools. (Which raises, again, the question of school vouchers – a political philosophy of choice in the schools?)

Onto a state route, maintained collaboratively by the city and the state highway system , I see the work mandated by the federal EPA. And then a right hand turn - the federal building. (This building was constructed at the urging of a member of Congress, a Republican (William Ayres); and named for the member of Congress , a Democrat, John Seiberling, who defeated him.)

I arrive at my stop; the library, supported, in part, by voted property taxes. This is what I would call “millage in action”.

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If I was to continue on the bus to the central transit center; I would pass the campus of our local governments, city, county, and judiciary; the state office tower; a major state supported university; past the local board of elections (democracy!), a zoo, and sites that -help children- help those who are developmentally disabled – and those suffering from addictions.

Who has time to consider all that is involved in government operations that profoundly effects “We the People”?

(And there’s more to consider; taxes that impact other political subdivisions within the county, e.g. townships, villages, and other cities.)

But for now, pour yourself a glass of iced tea; pick one of the suggested readings, and take a moment to consider our democracy.

Even in leafing through one of the suggested readings, one page at a time, you will not be disappointed. You are a part of this great process.